

KNOW AND ACT



Roma women in shelters for victims of **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

What we do?

ENCOUNTERING AND HELPING ROMA WOMEN IN THE SHELTERS

Roma women experience the same kind of domestic violence as women in the general population. It is, however, important to identify certain special features of violence against Roma women.

Roma women have a higher threshold for filing a restraining order or reporting the violence to the police than the general population.

Why?

GETTING HELP FROM OUTSIDE IS IMPORTANT

The Roma culture may have features that make it more difficult for women to seek and receive help. Getting help from outside the Roma community is important since Roma women who have encountered violence cannot usually rely for help from the community. The shelters for victims of domestic violence and other support services play, therefore, important roles.

How we help?

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CULTURAL FEATURES

As a rule professionals should treat Roma women the same way as any other client. There are, however, some cultural features that all professionals should bear in mind. Clients should be consulted on how they wish their cultural background be reflected in the services they receive or on any other issues that puzzle the professionals.

Roma women may find it difficult to talk to people close to them about the domestic violence they have experienced. Violence between spouses is a matter for the whole community in the Roma culture. The extended family may want to intervene if they find out about violence against one of their women.

The women usually know the consequences of their actions and behaviour and try to avoid them the best they can.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE ROMA

- It is not proper to discuss one's personal issues and problems outside the family. It would also be a violation of family honour that may have far-reaching consequences.
- The Roma custom of respect for older people should be taken into account especially if there are Roma women of different ages in the shelter.
- The Roma customs regarding cleanliness also affect housing, cleanliness and toilet use. Younger Roma do not use the sanitary facilities if older Roma are present.
- Roma clients' reluctance to speak about shameful things does not mean they are unwilling to co-operate; it is part of the Roma culture.
- Roma women are discreet about sexuality.

VIOLENCE MAY TURN INTO PERSECUTION

Persecution means

- Repeated unwanted contact, stalking, monitoring and threatening that causes fear and anxiety in the victim.
- Persecution is often preceded by violence between spouses.
- The importance of the Roma community and the man's right to his children may sometimes increase the risk of persecution.
- It is not necessarily the husband who is persecuting a Roma woman.
- Roma women can even be persecuted by their husband's relative or relatives.
- Even close relatives of the victim may be persecuted.

Persecution is a criminal offence (Criminal Code, 25:7a).

BEAR IN MIND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMA CULTURE

- Remember that each individual and family have their own circumstances. The Roma culture, too, is undergoing constant change. It is important to always seek individual solutions.
- Bear in mind that the characteristics of the Roma culture do not explain violence.
- Do not assume that Roma women get the necessary support and assistance from their families or community.
- Where necessary complete the risk assessment of harassment and persecution. It can be used in all cases involving persecution and harassment. Always complete the risk assessment if there are more than two occurrences of persecution or harassment or if the client is very frightened.
- Where necessary, sit down with the client and make a network map of the persons involved or the persons menacing the client.
- Bear in mind that Roma women may need to move to another municipality to escape the violence.



CHILDREN IN DIVORCE AND VIOLENCE SITUATIONS

Roma women may be afraid of losing their children. This fear may prevent them from leaving the violent relationship.

In the Roma culture men have the power to decide who gets the children in divorce. Traditionally, children belong to the man and his family, but it is also possible to agree that the mother gets the children.

Pay particular attention to the children's situation and their need for help. The children may have witnessed a lot of violence. Tell your client how violence affects children.

Sometimes some of the client's children are still at home or with their grandparents. Discuss with the client her children's situation. Child welfare services are responsible for finding out how things are with the children who are not with the mother.

A member of staff in the shelter for victims of domestic violence may offer to assist the client in her dealings with the child welfare services.

MORE INFORMATION IN FINNISH

www.thl.fi/turvakotipalvelut
www.thl.fi/kasvunkumppanit > työn tueksi >
Lähisuhde- ja perheväkivallan ehkäisytyö

CONTACT DETAILS

Helena Ewalds
Development Manager, Government Services, Other Special Services
Joonas Peltonen
Senior Specialist, Government Services, Other Special Services
firstname.lastname@thl.fi

National Institute for Health and Welfare THL
www.thl.fi • twitter.com/THLorg • facebook.com/thl.fi



NATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE

